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Our Deal With Peking: All Cost, No Benefit

Even the Chinese Now Know We Cannot Be Relied on Too Much

By George Bush

THE AIRWAVES are filled now with glad tidings from the White House, proclaiming that President Carter's China initiative has brought us much closer to peace on earth, good will to man.

How joyous it would be if that were true, but, unfortunately, nearly every Christmas story has its grinch — and this one is no exception.

The tragic fact is that the price our government has paid in recognizing the People's Republic of China has not only diminished American credibility in the world but has also darkened the prospects for peace. And I would venture that in the privacy of the Great Hall, the Chinese are acutely aware of that.

Let me explain by first introducing a bit of history. When I arrived in Peking in 1974 as the U.S. representative there, the Nixon and Kissinger trips and the Shanghai Communique were already on record. The United States was committed to eventual recognition of the People's Republic.

Moreover, ordinary Chinese citizens were intensely emotional in their desire for reunification with Taiwan. I remember in the early days how Chinese workmen refused to hang a map of Asia on my office wall because it showed Taiwan in a different color from the mainland. Not long thereafter, at sporting games that drew provincial teams from all over the mainland, the stands exploded with cheers when the announcer identified one squad as "our brothers from Taiwan." Government propaganda reflected much the same sentiment.

Yet, in private conversations the rulers of the People's Republic took a very different view. They were committed, of course, to the "liberation" of Taiwan, but that was always a distinctly secondary issue. "You have time; there is no hurry," they said over and over again.

When President Ford, Secretary Kissinger and I met with chairman Mao Tse-tung in October 1975, he repeated that settlement of the Taiwan question might take the United States and China "one year, ten years, or even a hundred years" to achieve. He clearly expected to die before it happened, and he was equally clear that if the United States wanted more time to modify opinion at home, that was readily acceptable.

What concerned Mao far more than the Taiwan question — and has since preoccupied his successors — was the gathering strength of the Soviet Union. The leaders in Peking are terrified that one day they may be encircled by a Soviet empire, eager to gobble them up. Forty-five Russian divisions are already poised on their northern border, and in recent months their security has deteriorated along their southern rim as well.

To the Chinese, the key to peace is for the United States and its western allies to act as a firm, reliable counterweight to Soviet pressures. Only if the United States remains a credible world power — one that honors its commitments and lives up to its responsibilities — are they themselves secure.

Breaking a Treaty Without Cause

HERE, THEN, is the situation that Jimmy Carter found when he entered the Oval Office:

On one hand, Peking was transfixed with the idea that the Soviet Union sought "hegemony" in many parts of the globe and was already convinced that the West was growing "soft."

On the other hand, while continuing to pay lip service to "normalization" of relations with the United States, the Chinese quietly accepted the fact that the two sides were deadlocked on that issue. For several years, Peking had insisted on three preconditions before there could be "normalization": The United States had to abrogate its mutual defense treaty with Taiwan, had to withdraw troops there, and had to withdraw recognition from Taiwan, acknowledging Peking as the sole, legitimate government of China. The United States had consistently balked at those terms, insisting that it would not formally recognize Peking until there was a firm, explicit commitment to settle the Taiwanese issue peacefully. And there the negotiations were stuck.

Because of the importance of the Russian threat, however, the questions of full "normalization" and of Taiwan were never a major barrier to progress on commercial and strategic issues. China and the United States had entered a de facto political relationship that had two great virtues: It permitted both sides to begin working harmoniously together, and it also allowed the United States to maintain the integrity of its commitment to Taiwan. In an imperfect world, that was a major accomplishment.

It was in this context that President Carter's Dec. 15 announcement was such a bombshell.

The immediate question was not whether we should recognize Peking. Many Americans now agree that a close, working relationship between Washington and Peking should advance the cause of peace and world trade. Personally, I have long felt that in spite of the totalitarian nature of the Chinese government, it was in our own national interest to improve relations with Peking.

But the critical question was the terms on which the recognition was negotiated. Incredibly, it turns out that the United States has now accepted all three of Peking's original demands — and has capitulated on its own demand for a guarantee on Taiwan, abandoning a faithful friend in the process. For the first time in our history, a peacetime American government has renounced a treaty with an ally without cause or benefit.

A Figleaf for Retreat

BY THE administration's own admission, it never received — or even asked for — specific assurances from Peking about a peaceful solution to the Taiwanese question. In Peking's eyes, the Taiwanese matter continues to be strictly an internal issue, and in its constitution the "liberation" of Taiwan remains an unchallenged goal.

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Bush, former chairman of the Republican National Committee, has also held the posts of U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, director of the Central Intelligence Agency and U.S. representative to Peking.

In response, the administration argues that the mainland will wink at future U.S. arms sales to the Taiwanese. But in the same breath, administration officials say *sotto voce* that those sales will be "restrained."

The administration also argues that Peking has neither the capability nor the incentive to conquer Taiwan. But any student of Chinese history — remembering that during the Cultural Revolution, only 10 years ago, some of today's Chinese leaders were driven down Peking streets with sticks — can properly ask: Who knows with certainty what lies ahead? It is true that armed conquest by the mainland does not seem imminent, but because of unilateral action by the United States, the 17 million people on Taiwan are now hostage to the changing whims of the Peking leadership.

The terms that the Carter administration has accepted, and even trumpeted, are the same terms that have been available for the past seven years. But they were always refused before because we knew — just as the Chinese knew — that in the absence of sufficient guarantees, they were but a figleaf for an abject American retreat.

The terrible truth is that the United States now stands exposed to the world as a nation willing to betray a friend — even when there is no apparent gain.

There is, of course, room for reasonable men to disagree about the benefits that might now accrue to China and the United States in trade and investment. Contrary to administration claims, however, I believe the gains that are likely to occur undoubtedly would have occurred anyway under our existing relationship.

Over the past year and a half, before these negotiations had even begun, the Chinese were ardently seeking western technology and our sales to China were rising dramatically. Over the past four months the commercial pace has accelerated, and many American companies have begun making serious plans for trading with the mainland and investing there. But it has always been apparent in the commercial field that China needs us more than we need them. Indeed, it was precisely China's growing eagerness for trade that gave the United States greater leverage in our diplomatic bargaining than we had ever had before — leverage that we carelessly tossed aside.

Morality and Strategy

AT ITS HEART, however, the China question is not one of trade and technology but of fundamental morality and international strategy.

As sociologist Peter Berger wrote earlier this year, "If there is one universal, indeed primeval principle of morality, it is that one must not deliver one's friends to their enemies." Berger was writing of refugees fleeing from Vietnam in their small, makeshift dinghies. "These boats," he said, "bear a message. It is a simple and ugly message. *Here is what happens to those who put their trust in the United States of America.*"

For President Carter, who professes a strong belief in Christian ethics, it should be a tormenting thought that by his hand, the United States has put an entire people adrift in a cruel, hostile sea — and for scarcely any purpose.

The moral question is closely linked to the strategic issue that is causing perhaps even greater consternation in many chanceries of the world.

Throughout the postwar period, America's credibility — joined with America's military might — has been the glue that has held together the non-communist world. Justifiably, both friend and foe alike are now asking, however, whether the United States can still be counted on to keep its word. Increasingly in recent years the United States has staked out a clear, unequivocal position, has invited others to join us, and then, as counterpressures have built up, has suddenly, inexplicably buckled.

In Africa, we committed ourselves to support the forces of moderation. But when black moderates in Rhodesia arranged with Prime Minister Ian Smith for the transfer of power and free elections, we threw in our lot with Marxist radicals.

In recent negotiations in the Middle East, the Israelis announced that they were prepared to accept a final plan drafted with American help. But when Egypt raised the ante, we modified our position to accept the new Egyptian proposals, and when the Israelis refused to go along, we publicly kicked them in the shins.

In Europe, President Carter convinced our German and French allies that we would build a neutron bomb, and Helmut Schmidt courageously supported him. But then, in the face of a Soviet propaganda campaign, the administration knuckled under and shelved the project. Even now, as contradictory signals emanate from Washington, our NATO allies wonder whether the United States will honor its pledge to raise defense expenditures by about 3 percent a year.

In Iran, the Carter administration placed considerable pressure on the shah to accelerate his liberalization program — sometimes, according to reports, against his better judgment. But when trouble broke out, our government disappeared over the hill. The world recognizes, even if we do not, that the United States could have been demonstrative in its support for the shah, issuing firmer statements, engaging in naval deployments, and responding with something more than timidity when the Russians warned us to stay out of it.

To friends of the United States, who have been chilled by these recent events and by our posture on SALT, the mindless abandonment of Taiwan thus comes at a particularly inopportune time. Why now? And why would the president act so unilaterally, without consulting with the Congress, especially after the Senate had insisted by a unanimous 94-to-0 vote upon such consultations? Unfortunately, there are no easy answers.

Understandably, Peking has been prominent among those worried about America's deteriorating position in the world. It has been particularly dismayed about Cuban intervention in Ethiopia, the major Soviet role in Afghanistan (a neighbor to both China and Iran), the pro-Soviet coup in South Yemen, as well as the hesitant U.S. response to Soviet claims with regard to a role in Iran. Indeed, this area of the world — including Southern Asia, the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean — is just as important strategically to the Chinese as to the United States.

The ultimate irony, then, of this "normalization" is that China, whose primary interest lies in a strong, steadfast American presence in the world, has now seen just how easily we can be pushed around. The Chinese realize that we have given all and gained nothing, and while they engage in self-congratulations, they know in their hearts that by our actions, we have also made the world a more dangerous place than it was only a few weeks ago.